

The founding fathers established three branches of government designed to check the balances of each other. They are the executive, legislation and judicial.

### **Executive Branch**

The Executive Branch of the United States government consists of the President, the Vice President, their respective offices and the Cabinet.

#### **The President**

The President is vested with the power to act as the head of state and the Commander-in-Chief of the United States armed forces. Specifically, the president is charged with implementing and enforcing laws passed by Congress (the legislative branch) and appointing the individuals in charge of various federal agencies which make up the Cabinet. The President also has the ability to accept or reject any legislation passed by Congress and his decision to reject legislation can only be overturned by a two-thirds vote of both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

#### **The Vice President**

The Vice President's primary duty is to be ready to assume the Presidency if the President is unable to perform their duties due to death, resignation or temporary incapacitation. The Vice President also acts as the President of the Senate, though they generally don't preside over the Senate unless there is a tie vote in which case they have the power to cast the deciding vote in the matter. Beyond the roles defined in the Constitution, the role of the Vice President varies between administrations. Some Presidents use their Vice Presidents to handle specific policy areas while others use them as a chief advisor.

#### **The Cabinet**

The Cabinet is the advisory panel for the President and is made up of the heads of the 15 executive departments. The heads of the departments are appointed by the President and then confirmed by the Senate. Generally, the people appointed by the President to the Cabinet have

a great deal of knowledge and experience in their given areas while also being some of the President's closest confidants.

### **The Departments of the Cabinet**

#### [Department of State](#)

The Department of the State handles America's foreign affairs through the creation of foreign policy, providing foreign assistance and preventing international crime.

#### [Department of the Treasury](#)

The Department of the Treasury maintains the security of the United States and international financial systems by providing such services as the production of currency, the collection of taxes and maintaining safe guards for various American financial institutions.

#### [Department of Defense](#)

The Department of Defense is charged with the defense of the United States both at home and abroad and consists of all branches of the military (Navy, Air force, Army.)

#### [Department of Justice](#)

The Department of Justice ensures that laws are both followed and enforced in order to ensure public safety, both in the United States and internationally for all American citizens.

#### [Department of the Interior](#)

The Department of the Interior protects America's natural resources through research and wildlife conservation.

#### [Department of Agriculture](#)

The Department of Agriculture creates and regulates policy on farming, agriculture, and food.

### [Department of Commerce](#)

The Department of Commerce promotes economic development by providing funding for research as well as data and statistics for businesses and various industries.

### [Department of Labor](#)

The Department of Labor provides protection for the American workforce through a variety of regulations including safe working conditions, minimum hourly pay and prevention of employee discrimination.

### [Department of Health and Human Services](#)

The Department of Health and Human Services is in charge of protecting the health of American citizens by providing necessary health services, drug and food regulation.

### [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)

The Department of Housing and Urban Development is in charge of policies and regulations concerning American housing needs, safe and affordable communities and providing affordable housing for low-income individuals.

### [Department of Transportation](#)

The Department of Transportation ensures the safety of all travel within the United States through the enforcement of aviation, highway and automobile regulations.

### [Department of Energy](#)

The Department of Energy creates energy policy while trying to create clean and affordable energy for American citizens and businesses.

### [Department of Education](#)

The Department of Education regulates educational standards and policy while also providing financial aid and data for educational institutions.

### [Department of Veterans Affairs](#)

The Department of Veterans Affairs is in charge of administering benefit programs for our nation's veterans and their families including pensions, life insurance and disability compensation.

### [Department of Homeland Security](#)

The Department of Homeland Security is in charge of maintaining the security of the United States from foreign and terrorist attacks on the American people, key resources and essential institutions.

## **The Legislative Branch**

The Legislative Branch is the branch of the government that creates and enacts legislation as well as the only branch that can declare war. It consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate which together make up the United States Congress.

The creation, refining and enactment of legislation is a complicated process which can often take a considerable amount of time. The only individuals who can introduce a bill on the Senate or House floor are Congressmen and Congresswomen themselves, but anyone can create a bill and propose it.

After a bill is introduced, it is then given to the proper committee in which Representatives who specialize in a given area (education, energy, defense, etc) will take a harder look at the bill's merits and practicality. The committee chair will then assign the bill to the proper subcommittee which investigates the legislation and how it will address the problems which it aims to solve.

After the bill makes it out of committee, it is placed on the Senate or House calendar in order to be discussed and debated on the floor. The bill will then be voted on and if it is passed with a majority of the votes, it will go on to the other side. For example, the Senate sends their bill to the House and vice versa. If the two disagree, the Senate and House will discuss their differences and reach a compromise. Once a compromise is reached, it must again be approved by the House and Senate and finally ends up on the desk of the President in order for his signature of approval or dismissal.

### The House of Representatives

The House of Representatives consists of 435 elected members, which are distributed among the states according to the population of each state along with an additional 6 non-voting members which represent places such as the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The House of Representatives is often known as the "People's House," as they are most closely tied to the people. Members of the House of Representatives serve two year terms.

The head of the House of Representatives is known as the Speaker of the House and he or she is third in line to the Presidency after the Vice-President. Within the House there are a series of Committees and Sub-committees which specialize in different areas of legislation such as health care and transportation.

### The Senate

The Senate is composed of 100 Senators, two from each of the 50 states which comprise the United States. Unlike the Representatives, Senators serve six year terms and are elected in a staggered fashion so that about one-third of the Senate is up for re-election every two years. While the Senate is part of the Legislative Branch and not the Executive Branch, the president of the Senate is the Vice-President.

The Senate has the ability to create treaties with foreign powers with a two-third vote as well as confirms any appointments made by the President to positions such as those in their cabinet and to various courts.

### **Duties of Congress**

Beyond enacting legislation, declaring war, creating treaties and confirming Presidential appointments, the Congress acts as a watchdog over the other branches of government as they are the only branch of the Government that is elected directly by the people.

One of the most effective ways that the Congress can keep the President's power in check is through the use of hearings. The House of Representatives has committees on Oversight and Government reform while the Senate has committees on Homeland Security and Government Affairs which have the ability to hold hearings and testimony from the various departments within the President's cabinet in order to ensure that they are conducting business properly and to maintain public accountability.

### **Judicial Branch**

The Judicial Branch of the United States government is the only one of the three branches that is not elected by the people, rather the individuals chosen to serve in the Judicial Branch are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. It was designed by the Founding Fathers not to give in to the political pressure and to protect the rights of political minorities.

While the Judicial Branch is a separate entity from the Legislative, Congress determines the shape and structure of the judiciary. Decisions such as how many justices serve on the Supreme Court and the establishment of inferior courts such as the United States district courts and the 13 different United States appeals courts.

### **[The Supreme Court](#)**

The United States Supreme Court is the highest court in the land and consists of nine justices, one of which being the Chief Justice and the other eight being Associate Justices. After being appointed, they serve for life and can only be removed by death, retirement or conviction by the Senate. Due to this, the Supreme Court is safe from political and electoral concerns in order to apply law with only justice in mind.

In order for an individual to bring a case to the Supreme Court, they must show that they have been harmed in some way. This prevents the Supreme Court from providing advisory opinions on matters of constitutionality and the legality of actions if it will have no practical effect.

Due to its interpretive nature, it is rare that the Supreme Court ever actually hears any trials. Cases heard by the Supreme Court are generally appellate cases, as the Supreme Court is the highest court in the land and has the final say in all judicial matters. The primary duty of the Court is to determine how a law should be applied along with its constitutionality.

### **Chief Justice**

John G. Roberts, Jr.

### **Associate Justices**

John Paul Stevens

Antonin Scalia

Anthony M. Kennedy

Clarence Thomas

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Steven G. Breyer

Samuel Anthony Alito, Jr.